

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 4751

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JM

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS "FAIRLY SOON" SAYS PRIME MINISTER

1. ARRIVING BACK AT NORMAN MANLEY AIRPORT FOLLOWING HIS OCTOBER 27-30 VISIT TO CANADA, PRIME MINISTER MICHAEL MANLEY TOLD NEWSMEN THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD "FAIRLY SOON". THE PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS FOLLOWED A QUERY FROM PRESSMEN WHO HAD ASKED HIM TO COMMENT ON A STATEMENT WHICH HE HAD REPORTEDLY MADE DURING HIS CANADIAN STAY THAT ELECTIONS ARE "IMMINENT" AND ARE "GOING TO BE HELD REASONABLY SOON".

2. THE PRIME MINISTER'S AIRPORT REMARK ONLY GAVE FRESH IMPETUS TO WHAT HAS BECOME ONE OF THE FAVORITE SPORTS IN JAMAICA: TRYING TO GUESS THE DATE ON WHICH THE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD. MOST SPECULATION IS CENTERED ON DECEMBER, AND THE DATE MORE FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IN RECENT DAYS IS DECEMBER 14 (AS DISTINCT FROM THE EARLIER FAVORITE, DECEMBER 21). MOST WILL READ THE PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS TO MEAN A DECEMBER ELECTION. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS STILL A BODY OF OPINION, WHICH FINDS A MEASURE OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM SOME SOURCES IN THE RULING PEOPLES' CONFIDENTIAL

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NATIONAL PARTY (PNP), WHICH HOLDS THAT NO ELECTION

WILL BE HELD BEFORE FEBRUARY. THIS GROUP POINTS TO THE RECENT EXTENSION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY (KINGSTON 4581) AND THE REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, NATIONAL SECURITY MINISTER KEBLE MUNN AND JUSTICE MINISTER (AND ATTORNEY GENERAL) CARL RATTRAY WHO HAVE ARGUED THE NECESSITY OF HOLDING THE ELECTIONS UNDER THE STATE OF EMERGENCY LEST THERE BE SERIOUS DISRUPTION OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. THIS BODY OF OPINION SAYS THAT THE EXTENSION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY UP UNTIL THE END OF FEBRUARY REVEALS THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO HOLD ELECTIONS IN THAT MONTH. WE THINK THAT THE RESPONSE TO THIS ARGUMENT IS A SCOTCH VERDICT, I.E., NOT PROVEN. MOREOVER, IT IS POSSIBLE TO SUSPECT THAT THE PNP MEMBERS MAY BE ENCOURAGING THE BELIEF IN A FEBRUARY ELECTION IN HOPES OF CATCHING THE OPPOSITION SHORT.

3. THE OPPOSITION JAMAICA LABOR PARTY (JLP) IS NOT OPERATING ON THE PREMISE OF A FEBRUARY ELECTION. RATHER, SOURCES IN THE JLP SAY THAT THEY ARE PREDICATING ALL THEIR PLANNING ON A DECEMBER ELECTION. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO AMEND THE ELECTORAL LAW TO PERMIT POLLING ON DECEMBER 14 (IT WOULD REQUIRE LEGISLATION TO SHORTEN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE DAY ON WHICH CANDIDATES ARE FORMALLY NOMINATED AND THE DAY OF POLLING) THE JLP PLANS TO BE READY, OR SO THESE SOURCES ASSERT.

4. THE JLP MAY HAVE DIMMED THE GOVERNMENT'S HOPES TO HOLD THE ELECTION IN DECEMBER BY USE OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MANEUVER. ACCORDING TO A REPORT WHICH APPEARED IN THE "GLENER" OF NOVEMBER 1, THE JLP HAS PLACED A PROPOSAL BEFORE THE CONSTITUENCIES BOUNDARIES COMMITTEE URGING THAT FOUR NEW CONSTITUENCIES BE CREATED RATHER THAN THE SEVEN WHICH THE RULING PNP HAS RECOMMENDED. WHILE THE FULL IMPACT OF THIS REPORTED MOVE BY THE JLP CANNOT YET BE JUDGED, IT IS SURE TO SLOW

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THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE. UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CONSTITUTION, THE COMMITTEE IS COMPRISED OF THREE MEMBERS EACH FROM THE RULING AND OPPOSITION PARTIES AND IS CHAIRED BY THE SPEAKER. THIS COMPOSITION, WHILE DESIGNED TO INSURE BALANCE AND DELIBERATION, ALSO SEEMS CERTAIN TO MAKE NECESSARY HORSE-TRADING. EARLIER INDICATIONS SUGGESTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HOPED TO HAVE THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

PLACED BEFORE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AS SOON AFTER
NOVEMBER 22 AS POSSIBLE (SEE KINGSTON 4337) AS
PART OF A MOVE TO HOLD A DECEMBER ELECTION.
WHETHER THIS CAN NOW BE DONE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
BUT IF THE JLP MEMBERS PERSIST IN THEIR DEMANDS
AND SPEAKER MCPHERSON PREFERS TO PLAY A MEDIATORY
RATHER THAN PARTISAN ROLE (WHICH WOULD BE IN CHARACTER),
THE COMMITTEE MAY TAKE MUCH MORE TIME THAN ORIGINALLY
THOUGHT TO COMPLETE ITS WORK.
DORRANCE

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